

Parental attributions about potential causes of Disruptive Behavior Disorders in boys and girls

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The present study aimed to investigate the structure of parental attributions about the causes of Disruptive Behavior Disorders (DBD) in children and to reveal several factors related to those attributions. 317 mothers and 317 fathers of children aged 4-6 completed the following: a) “The Parental Account of the Causes of Childhood Problems Questionnaire” (PACCP; Sonuga-Barke & Balding, 1993), adapted to examine parental attributions of DBD displayed by a child described in a vignette, and b) “The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire” (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), in order to screen for behavior problems in the participants’ own children. A between-subjects design was used, with two versions of the PACCP: one presenting a male and one presenting a female vignette. Six major perceived causes of DBD were extracted: parental absence, the child’s fault, organic causes, bad parenting and school/neighbourhood influences. The results revealed that parental absence was chosen preferably by mothers ($F=4.20, p<.05$). Moreover, organic causes were more often attributed to girls ($F=8.13, p<.01$), whereas school/neighbourhood influences were more often attributed to boys ($F=10.96, p=.001$). Finally, parents of children who presented DBD, considered school/neighbourhood influences as the most likely reason for the presence of DBD in girls ($F=4.09, p<.05$) and bad parenting as the least likely reason. The above findings are discussed in the framework of attributional theory. Their implications for clinical practice and therapeutic intervention for children with DBD are examined.